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Hatfield et al.

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(54) **EASY ACCESS ARTICLES OF FOOTWEAR**

(71) Applicant: **NIKE, Inc.**, Beaverton, OR (US)

(72) Inventors: **Tobie D. Hatfield**, Lake Oswego, OR (US); **Michael R. Friton**, Portland, OR (US)

(73) Assignee: **NIKE, Incorporated**, Beaverton, OR (US)

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A43B 3/08	(2006.01)
A43C 11/00	(2006.01)
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(58) **Field of Classification Search**
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USPC 36/138, 50.1, 112
See application file for complete search history.

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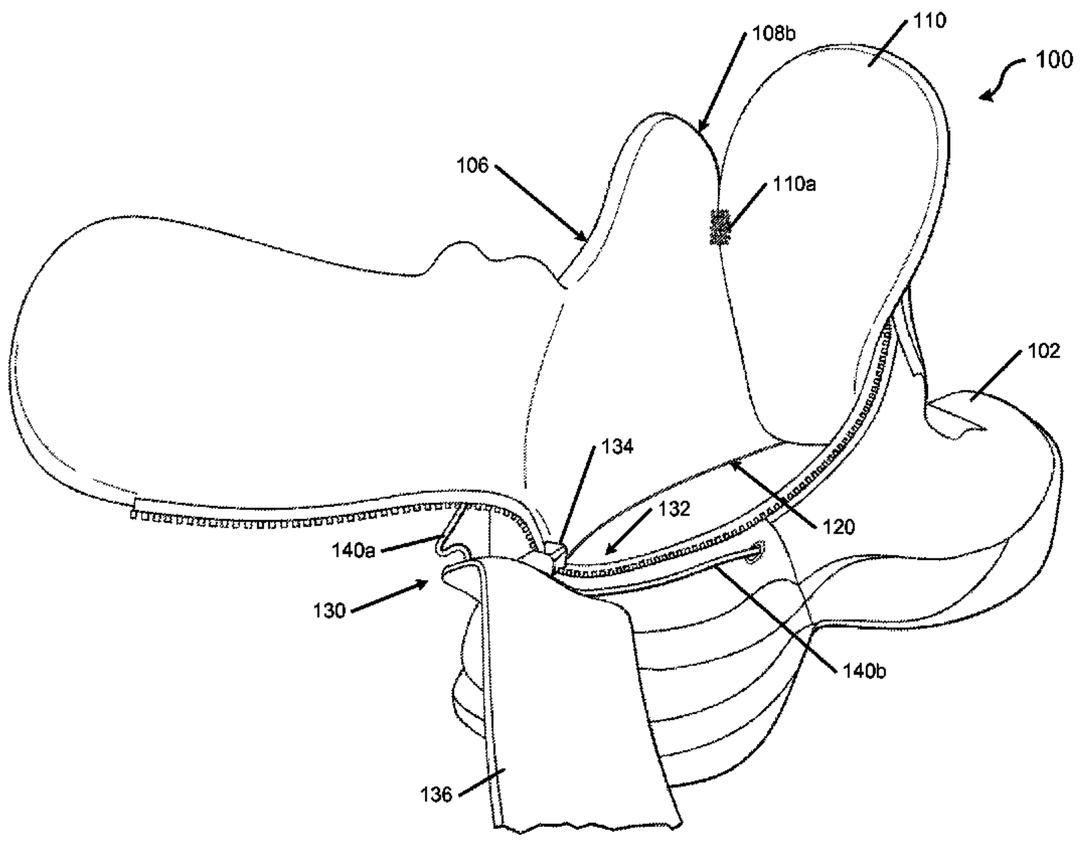
Primary Examiner — Ted Kavanaugh
(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Banner & Witcoff, Ltd.

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Articles of footwear, including athletic footwear, may include: (a) an upper including an opening through which a leg of a wearer extends, wherein the upper includes a foot insertion opening extending rearwardly and downwardly from a front portion of the leg opening at least to a heel area of the upper; (b) a closure system for releasably closing the foot insertion opening and optionally tightening the shoe on the foot; and (c) a sole structure engaged with the upper. The foot insertion opening widely opens the side and/or rear area of the shoe to allow for easy insertion and removal of a foot. Such uppers can be particularly useful for hightop athletic footwear, boots, or other footwear that extends up to or at least partially over a wearer's ankles.

31 Claims, 13 Drawing Sheets



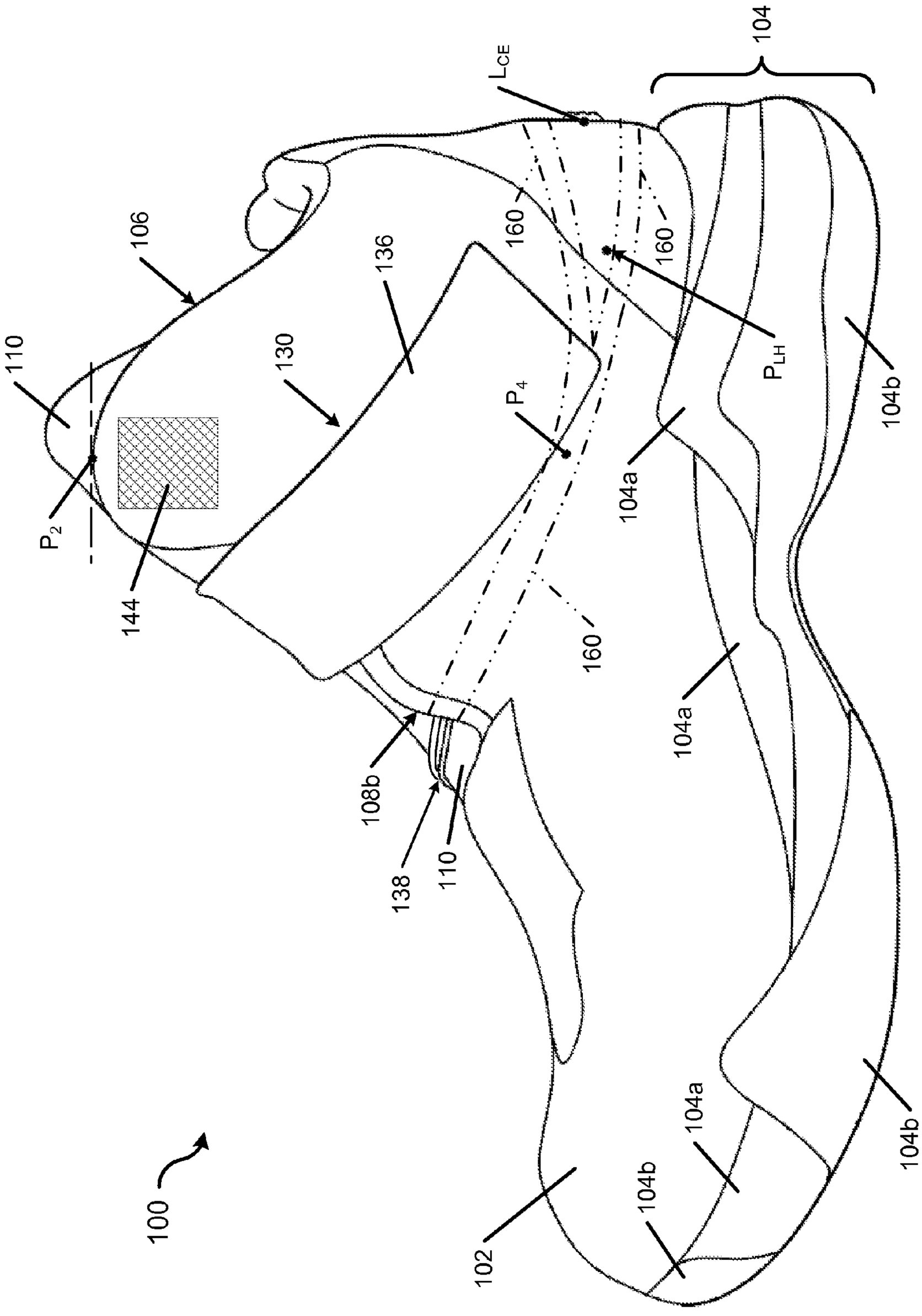
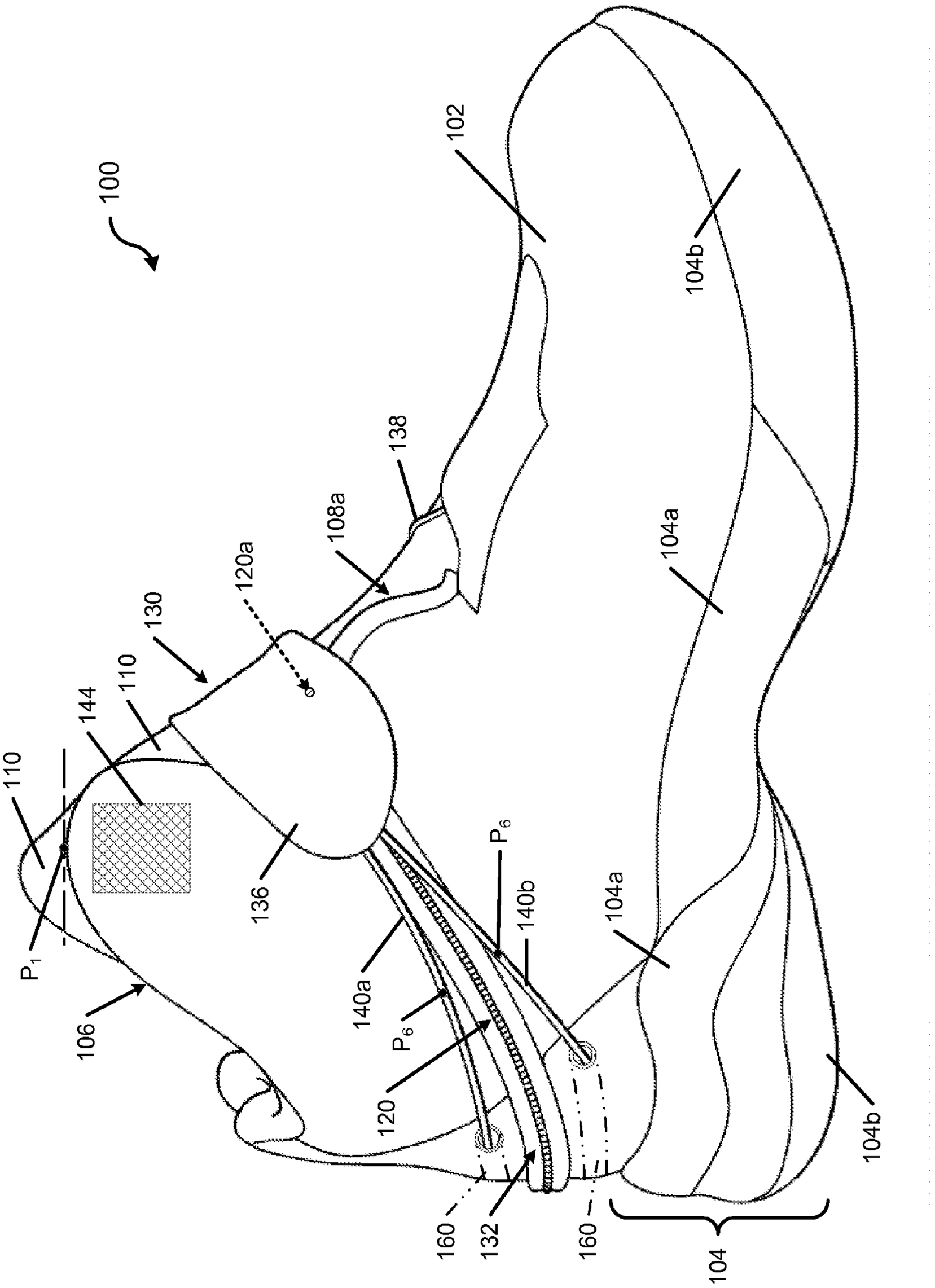

100
102
104
104a
104b
106
108b
110
130
136
138
144
160
L_{CE}
P_2
P_4
P_{LH}

FIG. 1A


100
102
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104a
104a
104b
104
108a
138
120a
130
110
144
110
136
P_1
106
140a
P_6
120
160
132
160
P_6
140b

FIG. 1B

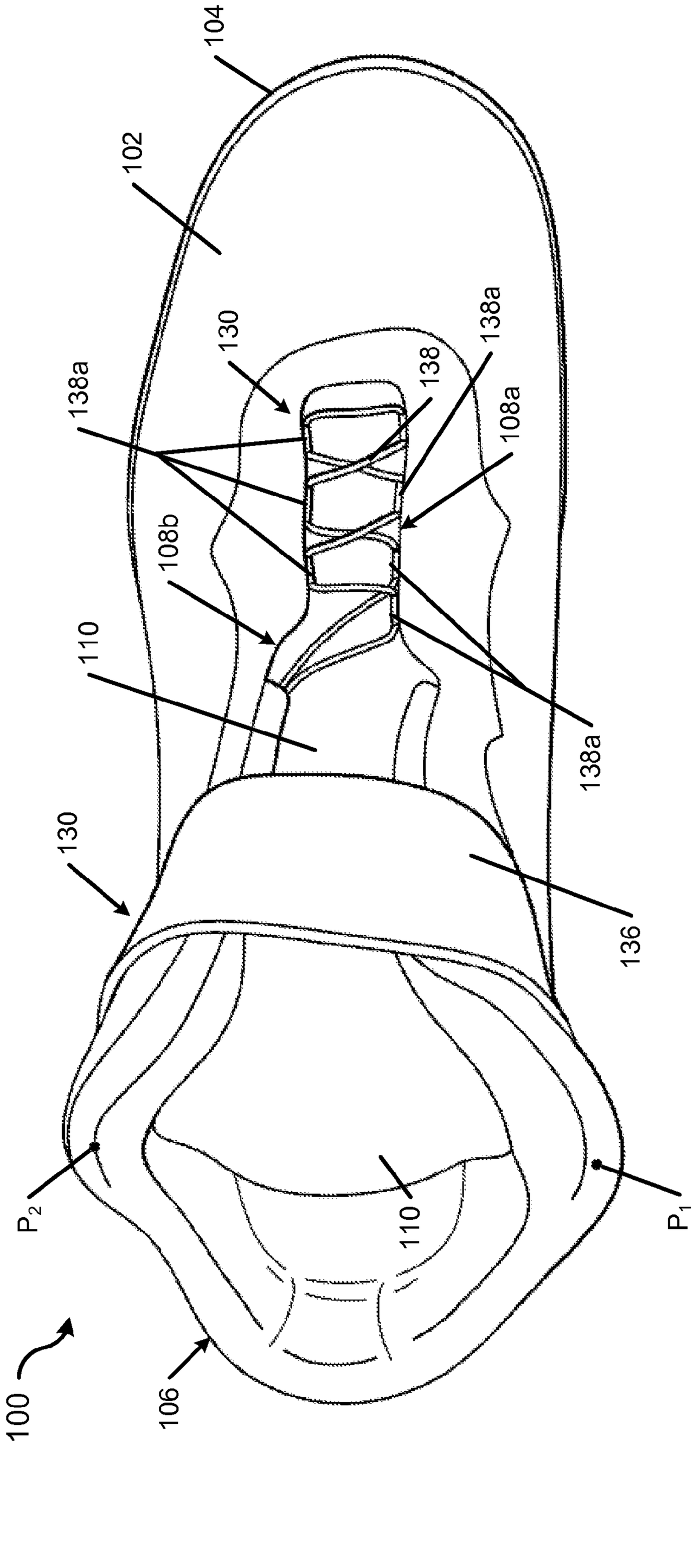

104
102
130
138a
138
108a
108b
110
138a
130
136
P_2
110
P_1
106
100

FIG. 1C

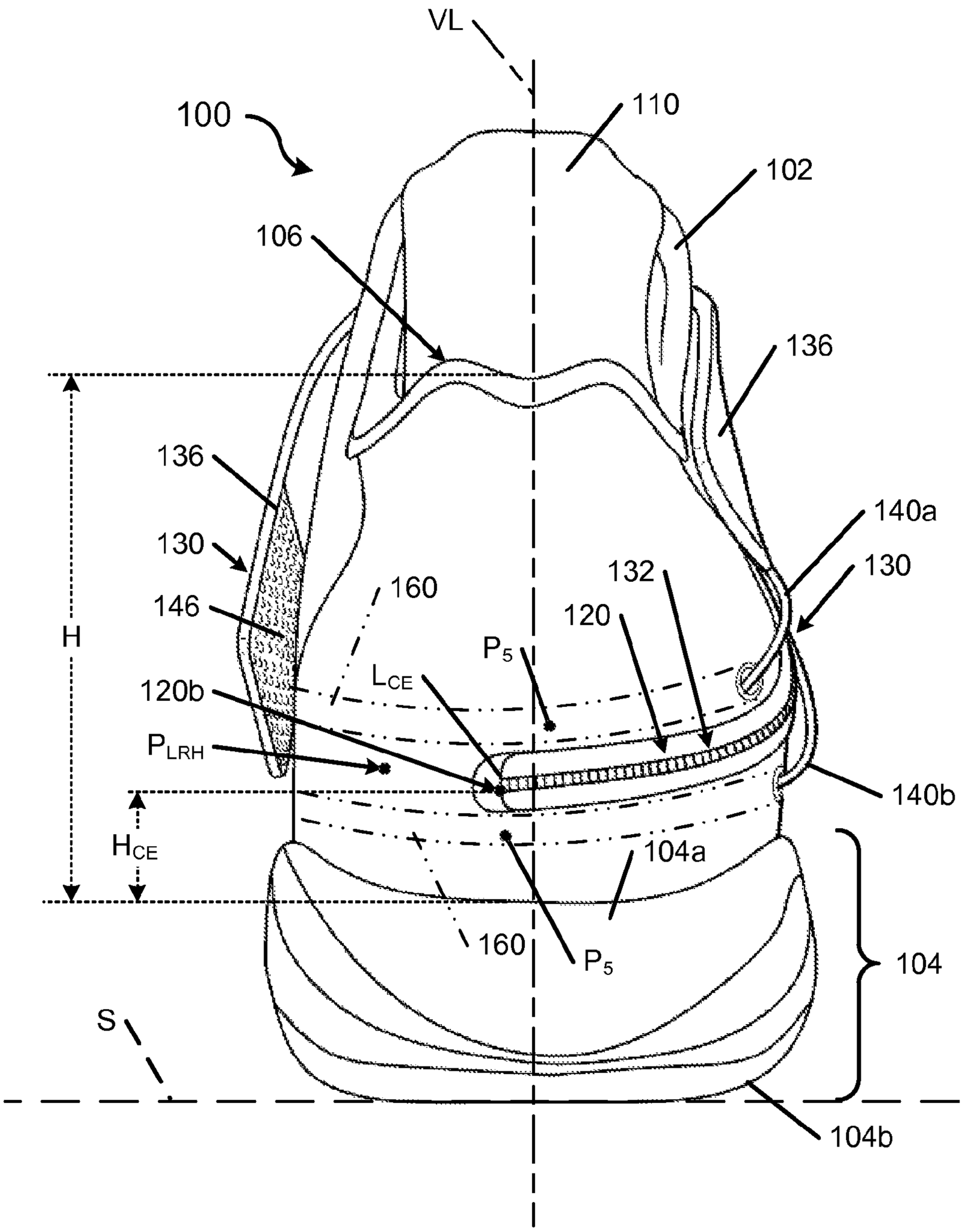

VL
100
110
102
106
136
136
130
140a
130
160
132
146
120
H
P_5
L_{CE}
120b
P_{LRH}
140b
H_{CE}
104a
160
P_5
104
S
104b

FIG. 1D

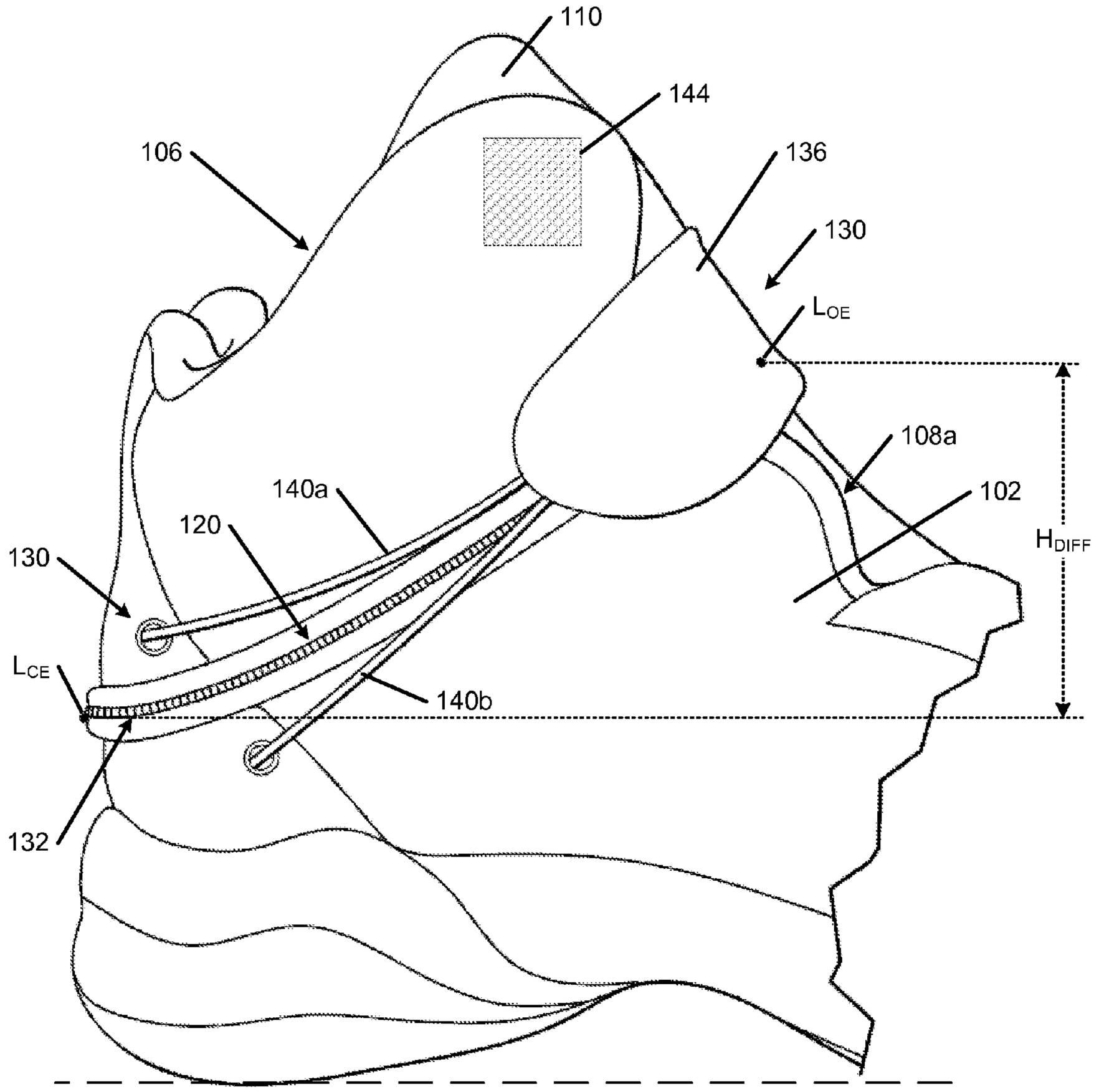

110
144
106
136
130
L_{OE}
108a
102
140a
120
130
H_{DIFF}
L_{CE}
140b
132

FIG. 1E

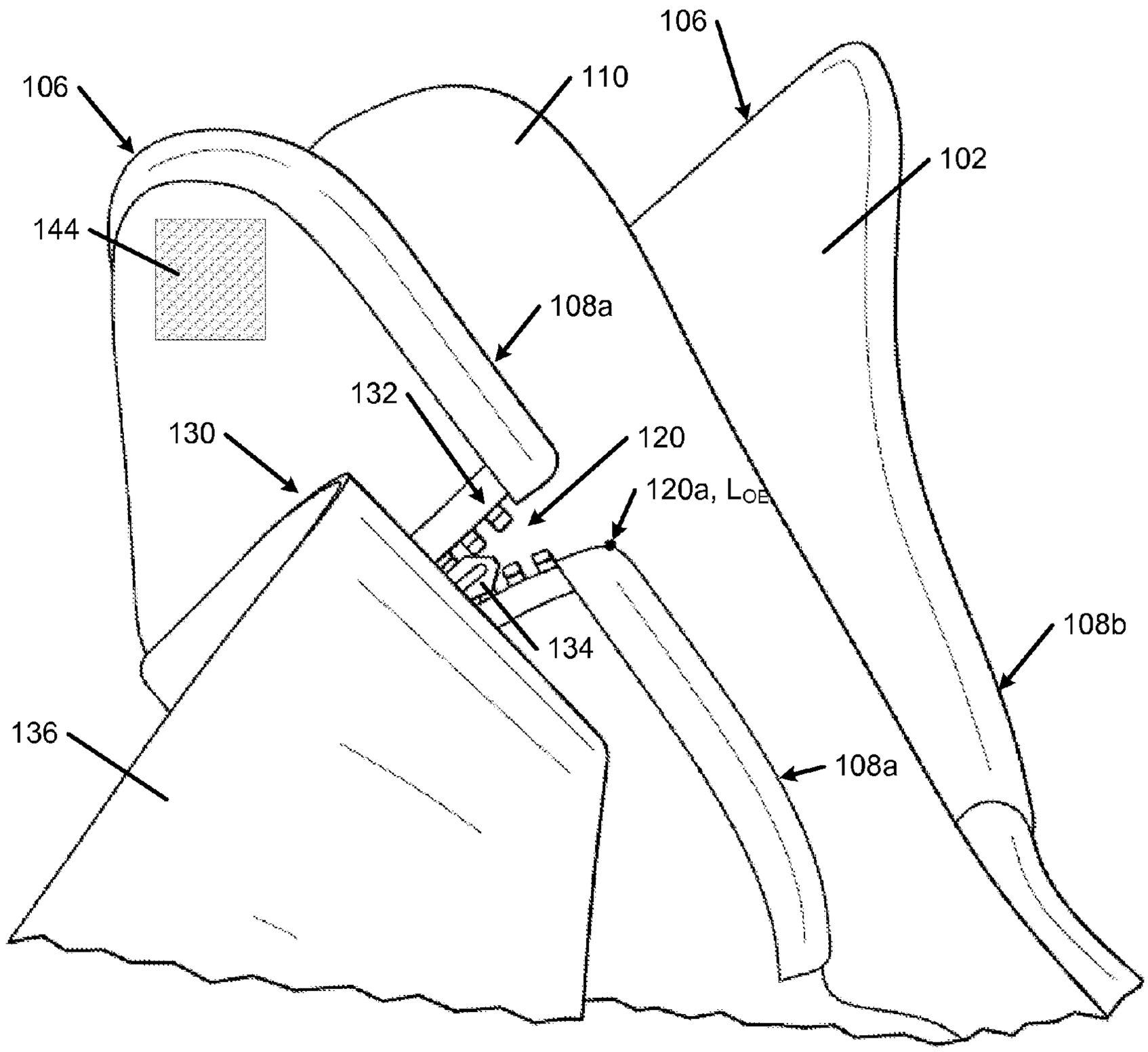


FIG. 2A

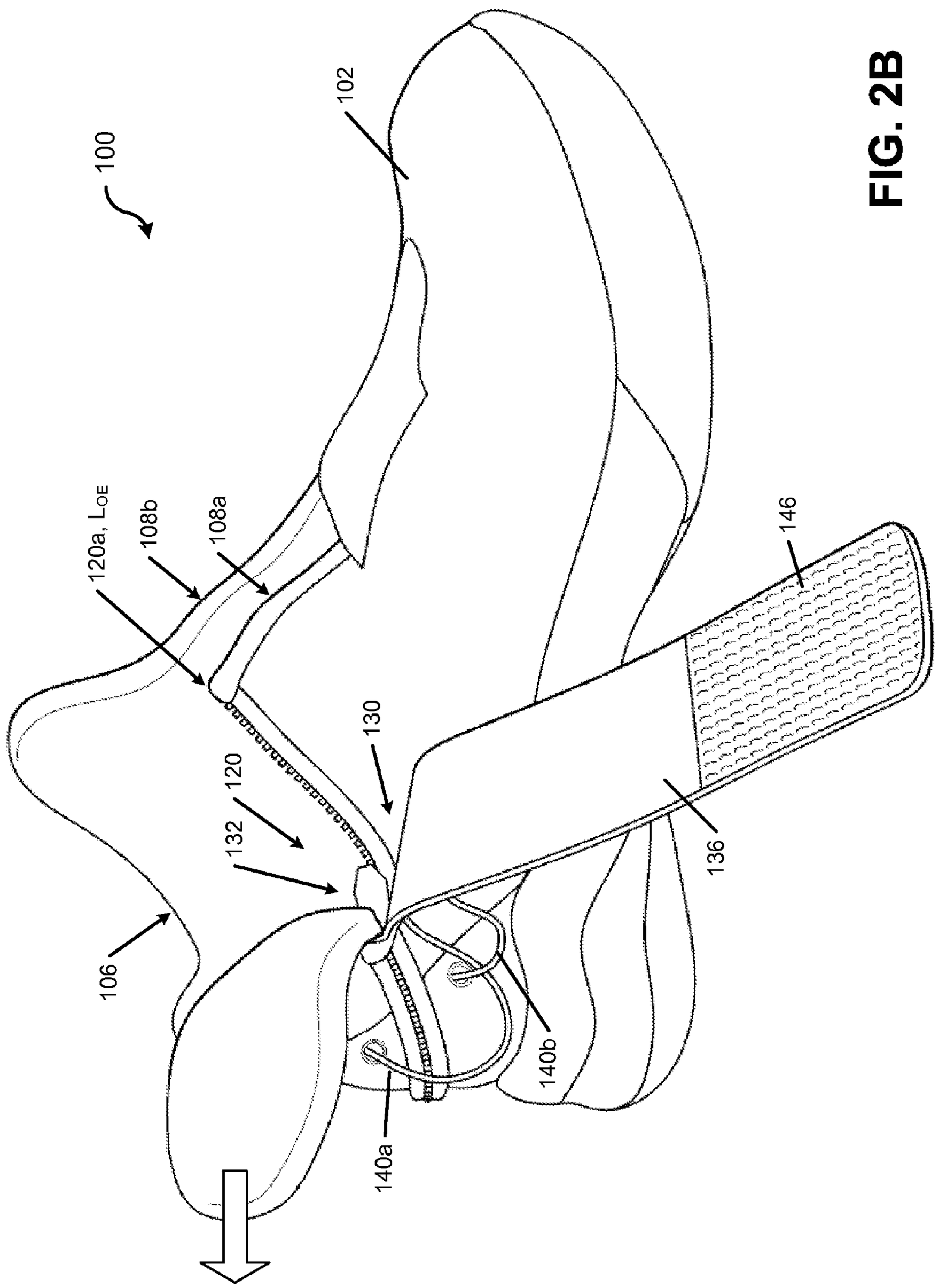


FIG. 2B

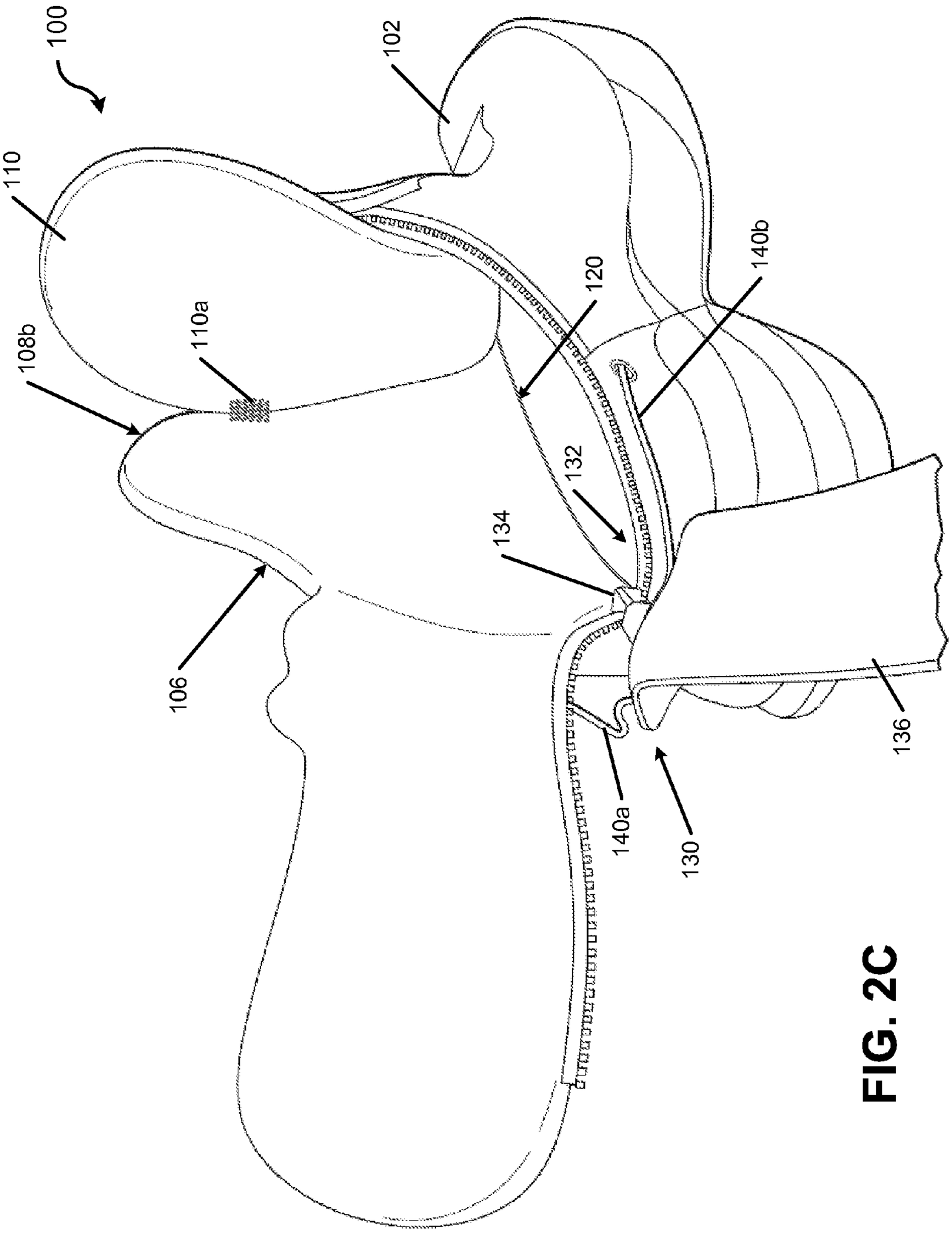


FIG. 2C

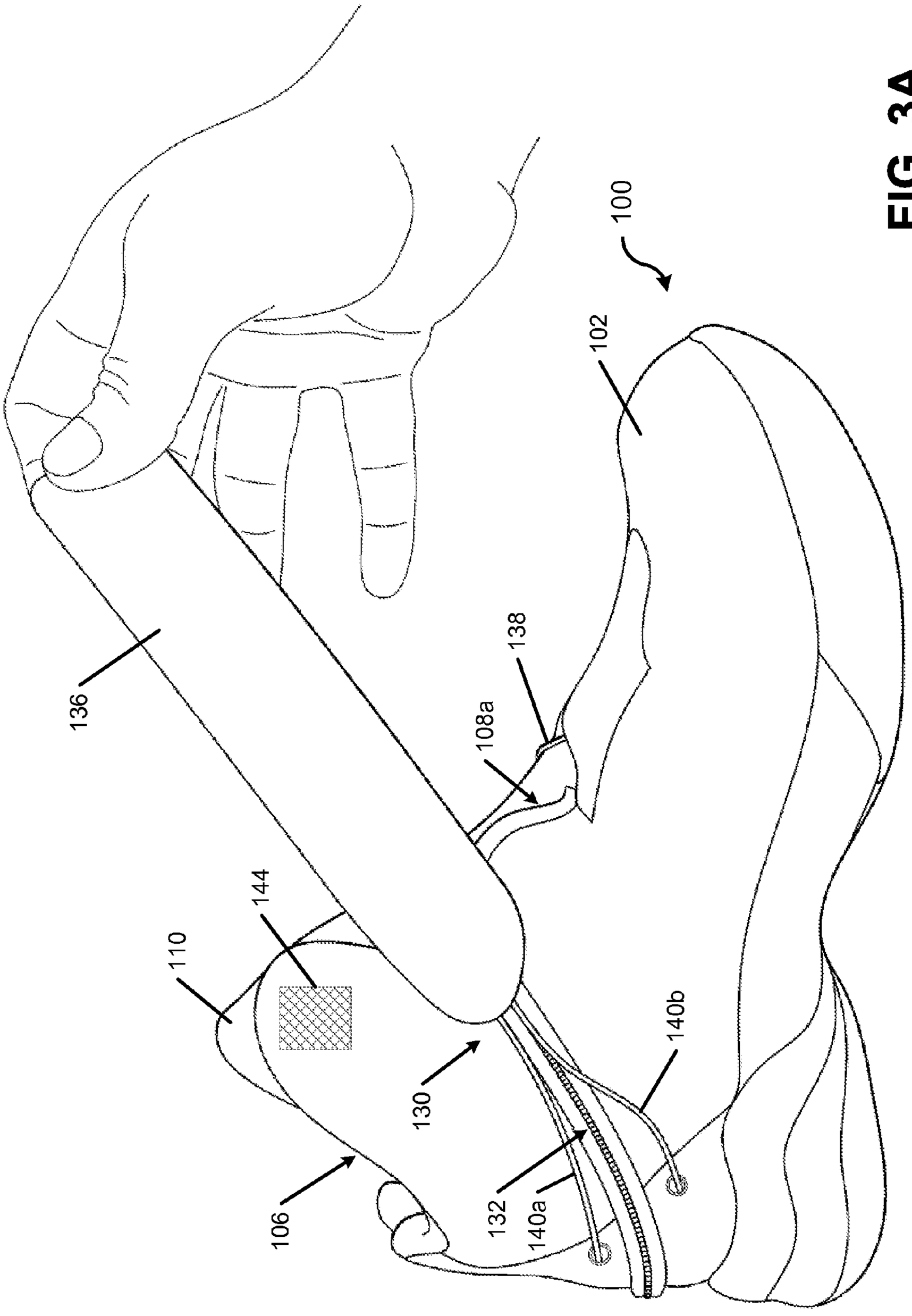
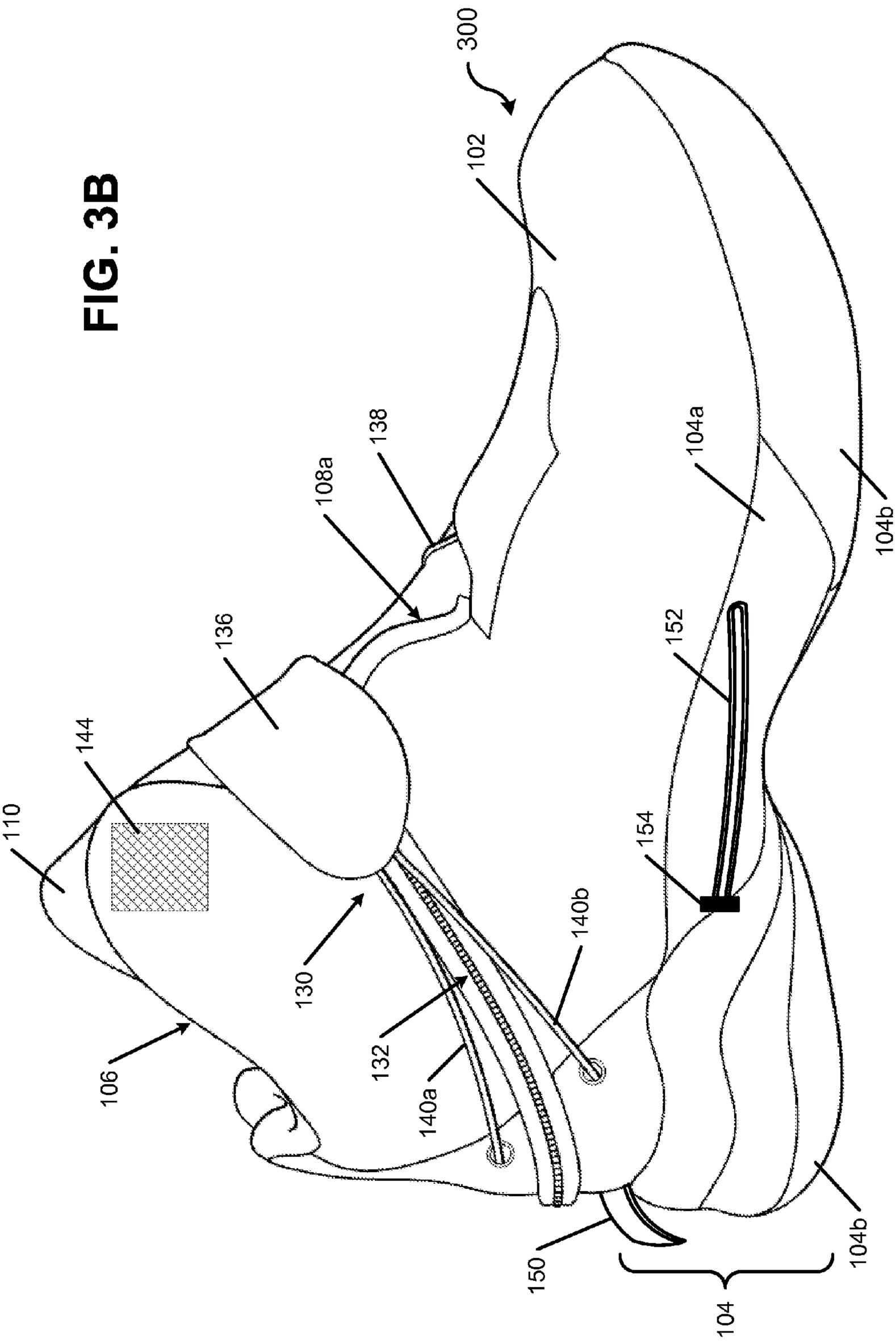


FIG. 3A

FIG. 3B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136
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110
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132
140a
140b
106
152
154
104a
104b
150
104

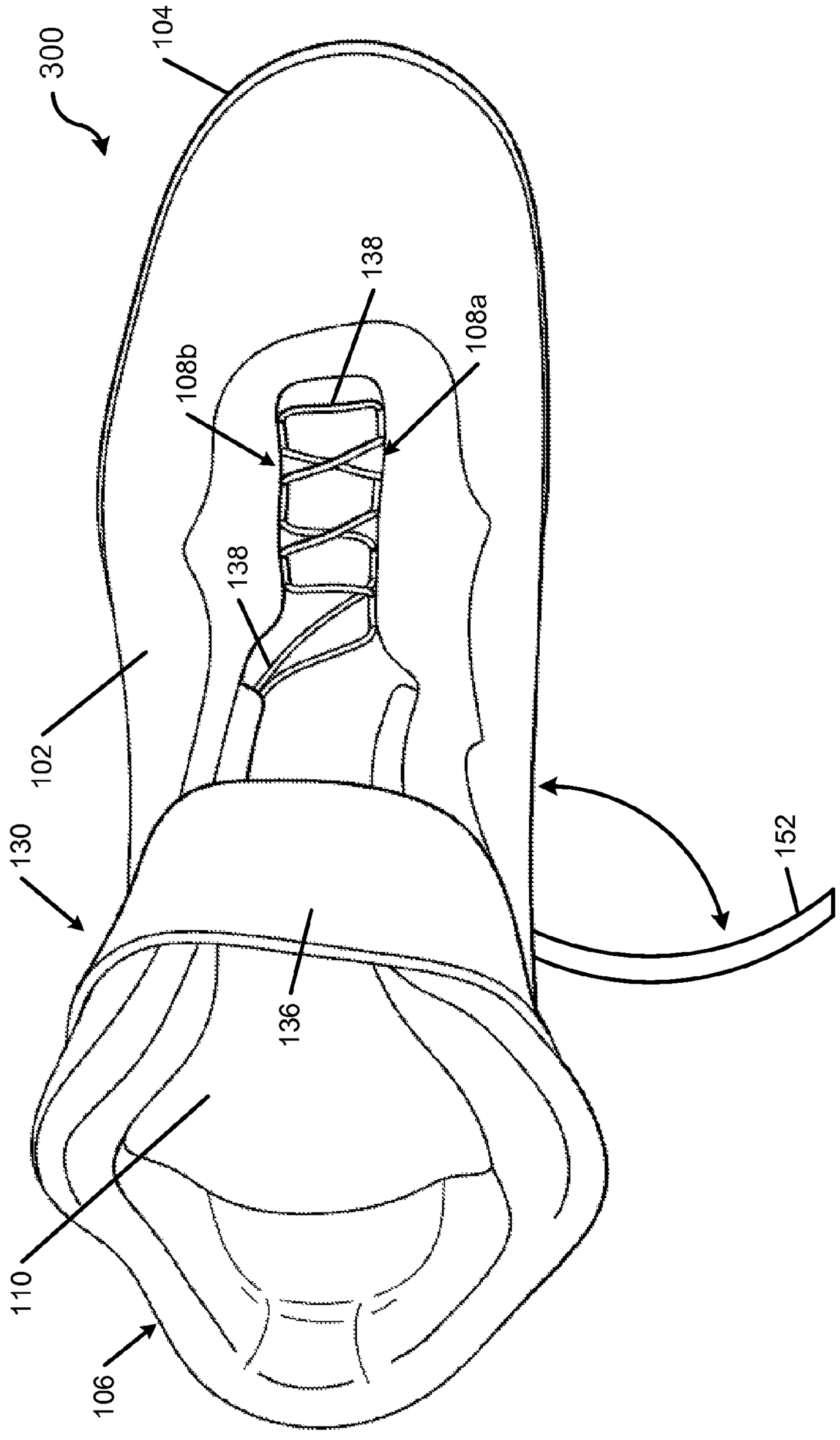

FIG. 3C

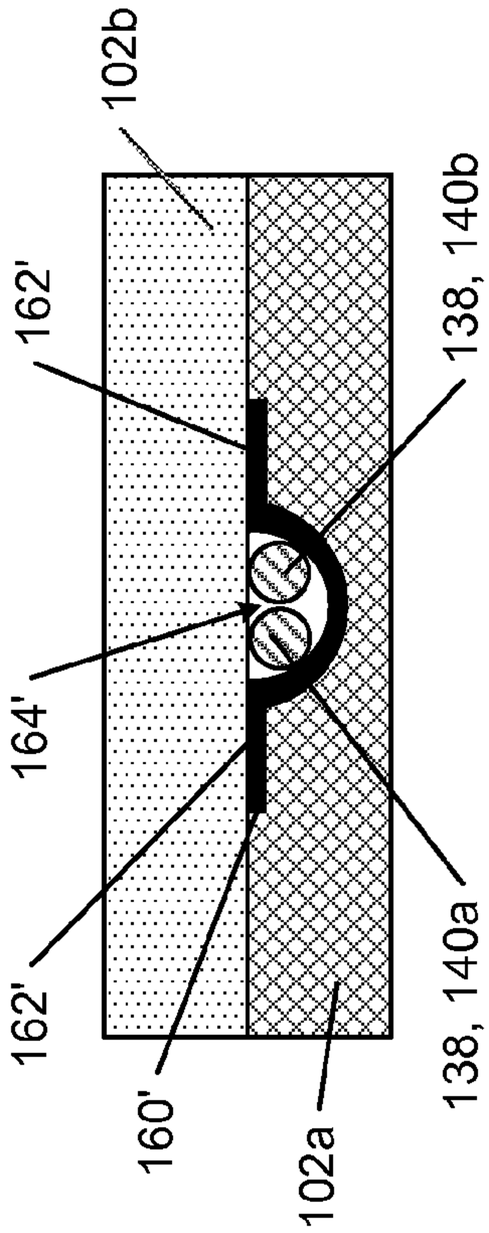

FIG. 4B

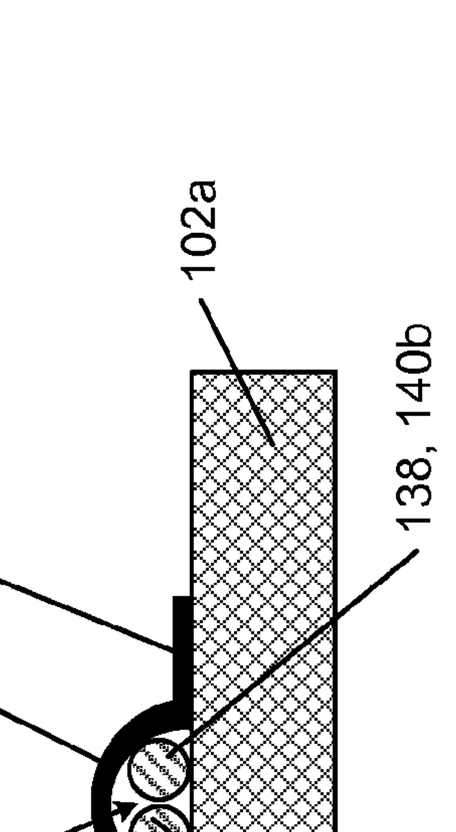

FIG. 4D

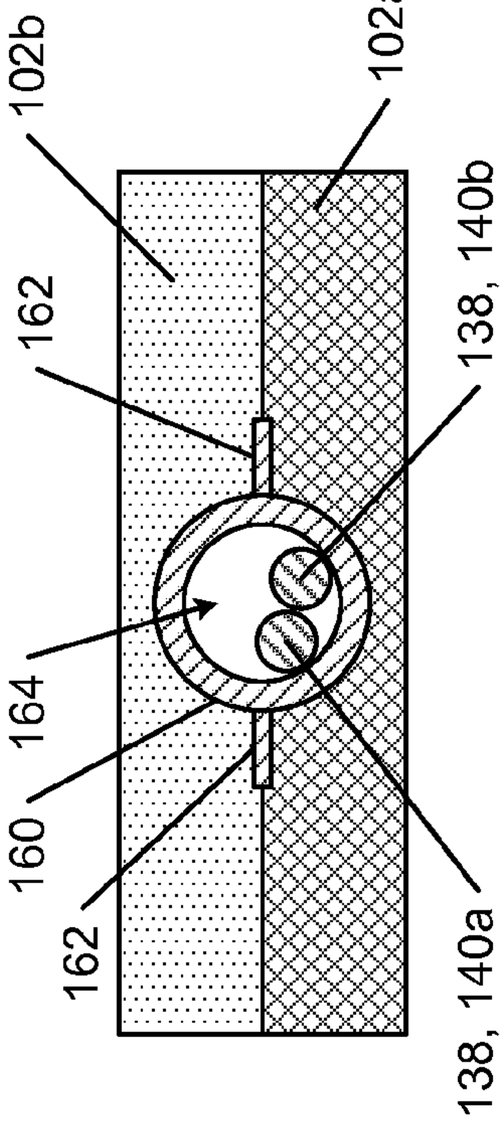

FIG. 4A

FIG. 4C

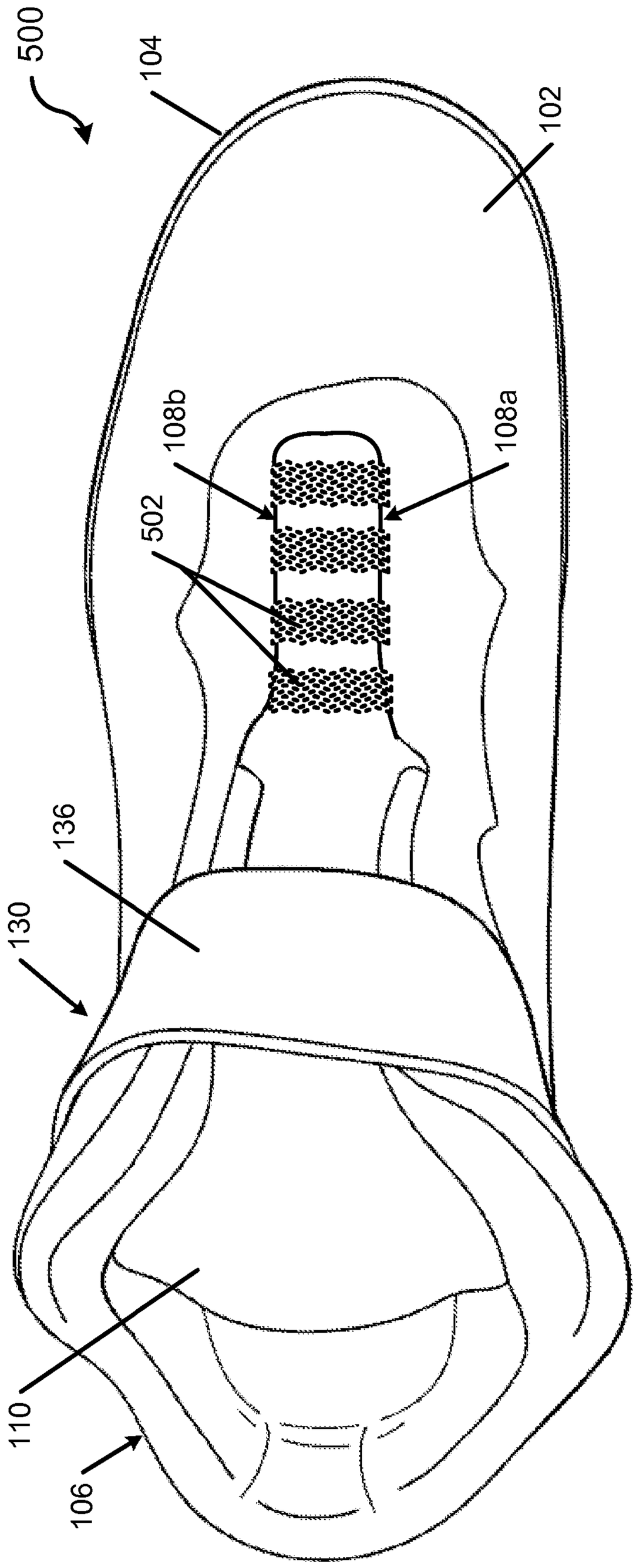

FIG. 5

EASY ACCESS ARTICLES OF FOOTWEAR

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to the field of footwear. More specifically, aspects of the present invention pertain to articles of footwear that include foot insertion openings capable of widely opening the side and/or rear area(s) of the shoe to allow for easy insertion and removal of a foot. Footwear uppers with large openings of this type can be particularly useful for hightop athletic footwear, boots, or other footwear structures that extend up to or at least partially over a wearer's ankles.

BACKGROUND

Conventional articles of athletic footwear include two primary elements, an upper and a sole structure. The upper may provide a covering for the foot that securely receives and positions the foot with respect to the sole structure. In addition, the upper may have a configuration that protects the foot and provides ventilation, thereby cooling the foot and removing perspiration. The sole structure may be secured to a lower surface of the upper and generally is positioned between the foot and any contact surface. In addition to attenuating ground reaction forces and absorbing energy, the sole structure may provide traction and control potentially harmful foot motion, such as over pronation. The general features and configurations of uppers and sole structures are discussed in greater detail below.

The upper forms a void on the interior of the footwear for receiving the foot. The void has the general shape of the foot, and access to the void is provided at an ankle opening. Accordingly, the upper extends over the instep and toe areas of the foot, along the medial and lateral sides of the foot, and around the heel area of the foot. A lacing system often is incorporated into the upper to selectively change the size of the ankle opening and to permit the wearer to modify certain dimensions of the upper, particularly girth, to accommodate feet with varying proportions. In addition, the upper may include a tongue that extends under the lacing system to enhance the comfort of the footwear (e.g., to modulate pressure applied to the foot by the laces), and the upper also may include a heel counter to limit or control movement of the heel.

Some articles of footwear, particularly footwear with uppers extending up to ankle height or over the ankle (also called "hightop" footwear herein, e.g., "hightop" basketball sneakers or other athletic footwear, workshoes, boots, and the like), can be difficult to put on and remove. If the shoes have laces or the like across the instep area, the wearer may be required to substantially loosen the laces (or other securing mechanisms) to enable the shoe to be easily put on and/or removed. These features can substantially increase the time and frustration level involved in putting on and taking off this "hightop" style of shoes.

Accordingly, there is room in the art for improvements in systems for enabling easy entry, removal, and/or securing of "hightop" footwear to the foot of wearers.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

This Summary is provided to introduce some general concepts relating to this invention in a simplified form that are further described below in the Detailed Description. This Summary is not intended to identify key features or essential features of the invention.

Footwear structures in accordance with at least some aspects of this invention may include foot insertion openings that widely open the side and/or rear area(s) of the shoe (e.g., the upper) to allow for easy insertion and removal of a foot.

Some more specific aspects of this invention relate to articles of footwear that may include: (a) an upper having or defining an opening through which a leg of a wearer extends, wherein the upper further includes a foot insertion opening extending rearwardly and downwardly from a front portion of the leg opening at least to a heel area of the upper; (b) a closure system for releasably closing the foot insertion opening; and (c) a sole structure engaged with the upper. The closure system further may include one or more of: (a) a strap extending at least partially around the leg (e.g., across the front) and releasably securing to the upper, (b) a lace (optionally engaged with the strap via an elastic component) extending across the instep area one or more times, and/or (c) one or more elastic elements extending across the instep area of the upper. The closure system may include structures for tightening the fit of the shoe around and securing the shoe to the wearer's foot.

While the invention is described above in terms of an entire article of footwear, additional aspects of this invention relate to uppers for use in such articles of footwear, methods of making such uppers and/or articles of footwear, and/or methods of securing such articles of footwear and/or uppers to a wearer's foot.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The foregoing Summary of the Invention, as well as the following Detailed Description of the Invention, will be better understood when considered in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which like reference numerals refer to the same or similar elements in all of the various views in which that reference number appears.

FIGS. **1**A through **1**E illustrate various views of an article of footwear according to some examples and aspects of this invention;

FIGS. **2**A through **2**C include views illustrating steps involved in disengaging the article of footwear of FIGS. **1**A through **1**E from a wearer's foot in accordance with at least some aspects of this invention;

FIG. **3**A includes a view illustrating engaging the article of footwear of FIGS. **1**A through **1**E with a wearer's foot in accordance with at least some aspects of this invention;

FIGS. **3**B and **3**C illustrate additional features and structures that may be included in articles of footwear in accordance with some examples of this invention;

FIGS. **4**A through **4**D illustrate example structures of guide members that may be included with article of footwear structures in accordance with at least some examples of this invention; and

FIG. **5** provides a top view of another example article of footwear in accordance with some aspects of this invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

In the following description of various examples of footwear structures and components according to the present invention, reference is made to the accompanying drawings, which form a part hereof, and in which are shown by way of illustration various example structures and environments in which aspects of the invention may be practiced. It is to be understood that other structures and environments may be utilized and that structural and functional modifications may

be made to the specifically described structures and methods without departing from the scope of the present invention.

I. General Description of Aspects of This Invention

Aspects of this invention relate to articles of footwear (e.g., athletic footwear) that include foot insertion openings that can widely open the side and/or rear area(s) of the shoe to allow for easy insertion and removal of a foot. Such footwear constructions can be particularly useful for "hightop" athletic footwear, boots, or other footwear having uppers that extend up to and/or at least partially over a wearer's ankles. More specific features and aspects of this invention will be described in more detail below.

Some aspects of this invention relate to articles of footwear that may include: (a) an upper having an opening through which a leg of a wearer extends (e.g., including a top opening, a first side edge extending forward from the top opening and along an instep area, and a second side edge opposite the first side edge and extending forward from the top opening and along the instep area), wherein the upper further includes a foot insertion opening extending rearwardly and downwardly from a front portion of the leg opening (e.g., from the first side edge) at least to a heel area of the upper; (b) a closure system for releasably closing the foot insertion opening (e.g., optionally including a zipper element or other releasable closure system); and (c) a sole structure engaged with the upper. The closure system further may include one or more of: (a) a strap extending at least partially around the leg (e.g., across the front of the leg, over the first side edge and over and beyond the second side edge, etc.) and releasably securing to the upper and/or sole structure, (b) a lace element (or an unstretchable tightening element) extending across the instep area one or more times and connecting the first and second side edges of the upper, and/or (c) one or more elastic or stretchable elements extending across the instep area and connecting the first and second side edges of the upper. This closure system may include structures for tightening the fit of the shoe around and securing the shoe to the wearer's foot.

Optionally, if desired, the strap (which optionally may be engaged with a slider element of the zipper system when the closure system includes a zipper system) may be engaged with the lace element such that pulling the strap pulls on and tightens the lace element at the instep area. In such structures, pulling on the strap to secure the shoe to a wearer's foot may function to close the closure system (e.g., zip the zipper system) and then tighten the lace element across the instep area. Optionally, in such structures, the lace element will be substantially inelastic and unstretchable, and this lace element may be engaged with the strap via one or more elastic elements (e.g., elastic band(s) that enable the strap to be pulled to a desired level of tightness). The strap, elastic element(s), and lace element may form a continuous path around the wearer's foot (e.g., from the top instep area and around the lower leg or ankle).

In other structures, however, the strap and the lace element and/or elastic elements across the instep area may be separated from one another such that while pulling on the strap to secure the shoe to a wearer's foot may function to close the closure system (e.g., zip the zipper system and/or tighten the strap around the foot), this action does not tighten or otherwise directly affect the lace element or other closure elements across the instep area. If desired, at least some portion(s) of the strap may be elastic or stretchable to enable some tightening around the leg.

Also, if desired, in some structures in accordance with this invention, at least some portions of the closure system (e.g., at least some portions of the lace element, at least some portions of elastic component(s) of the closure system, at least some portion of the strap, etc.) may extend between different layers of the upper. Some portions of the closure system (and its tightening system structures) may be located inside the upper and/or outside the upper as well. If desired, a guide system may be provided with the upper to form and maintain a path through which at least some portions of the closure system may pass. The guide system, which may constitute one or more individual parts or components, may form a tunnel or other passageway for containing portions of the closure system. The guide system features also can help reduce or eliminate undesired interactions between the closure/securing system elements and other items.

As another potential feature, articles of footwear in accordance with at least some examples of this invention may include a grip element engaged with the upper at a location proximate to the leg opening of the shoe (e.g., at or near the top opening through which the wearer's leg extends when the shoe is secured to the foot, at or near an edge of the leg opening, at or near the foot insertion opening and/or at or near the closure system for the foot insertion opening). This grip element may be held by the wearer as the wearer pulls the top portion of the upper (above the foot insertion opening and the closure system) to open the closure system for removal of the foot. The grip element may include tactile or grip enhancing features and/or it may provide added durability or wear resistance for this area (in view of its repeated handling for removing the shoe).

While the foot insertion opening in the shoe may extend any desired distance around the upper, in at least some examples of this invention, the foot insertion opening extends at least to a rear heel area of the upper, and in some instances to or beyond a vertical line extending upward from a rearmost point of the upper.

Given the general description of features, aspects, structures, processes, and arrangements according to certain embodiments of the invention provided above, a more detailed description of specific example articles of footwear and methods in accordance with this invention follows.

II. Detailed Description of Example Articles of Footwear According to This Invention

Referring to the figures and following discussion, various articles of footwear and features thereof in accordance with the present invention are described. The footwear depicted and discussed are athletic shoes, and the concepts disclosed with respect to various aspects of this footwear may be applied to a wide range of athletic footwear styles, including, but not limited to: basketball shoes, football shoes, hiking shoes, casual wear shoes, and the like. In addition, at least some concepts and aspects of the present invention may be applied to a wide range of non-athletic footwear, including work boots, dress boots, and the like. Accordingly, the present invention is not limited to the precise embodiments disclosed herein, but applies to footwear generally.

FIGS. **1**A through **1**E provide various views of one example article of footwear **100** in accordance with aspects of this invention. FIG. **1**A is a lateral side view, FIG. **1**B is a medial side view, FIG. **1**C is a top view, FIG. **1**D is a rear view, and FIG. **1**E is a close up view of a portion of the closure or securing system for this example article of footwear **100**. As generally shown in these figures, the article of footwear **100** includes an upper **102** and a sole structure **104** engaged with the upper **102**. The upper **102** of this illustrated example is a hightop athletic shoe upper (e.g., for basketball), although other shoe styles and upper styles are possible. The upper **102** of this example may include a strobel member or other structure extending along the bottom, plantar support surface (to at least partially enclose the bottom of the foot-receiving cham-

ber). The top of the upper **102** defines a leg opening **106** for the shoe (through which the wearer's leg extends when the shoe **100** is secured to the foot).

While it may take on any desired configuration and/or structure without departing from the invention, the sole structure **104** of this illustrated example shoe **100** includes a polymer foam midsole **104***a* (e.g., made from polyurethane foam, an ethylvinylacetate (EVA) foam, a lightweight foam from the LUNAR family of products (available from NIKE, Inc., of Beaverton, Oreg., etc.)). Additionally or alternatively, if desired, the midsole **104***a* may include one or more impact force attenuating columns (e.g., made of foam), one or more mechanical impact force attenuating components (e.g., "shock absorber" type structures), and/or one or more fluid-filled bladder structures. This midsole **104***a* is engaged with one or more outsole components **104***b* that at least partially cover the midsole **104***a* (e.g., by being glued or otherwise fixed to it) and provide at least a portion of a ground contact surface (e.g., with wear resistance properties, one or more traction elements, etc.). The midsole **104***a* and/or outsole **104***b* may constitute one or more independent parts, and they may extend the entire length and/or width of the article of footwear **100** or only portions thereof. Also, while shown exterior to the upper **102** in this illustrated example, some or all of the midsole **104***a* could be contained (or at least partially contained) within the interior chamber defined by the upper **102**. If desired, the strobel mentioned above could be omitted (or at least partially omitted) and the midsole **104***a* could provide the plantar support surface (or at least a portion thereof) for the article of footwear **100**.

As further shown in these figures, the upper **102** of this illustrated example includes the top leg opening **106**. The overall opening of this example article of footwear **100** includes a first side edge **108***a* (e.g., a medial side edge) extending forward from the top opening **106**, downward to and along the instep area of the shoe **100**. A second side edge **108***b* (e.g., a lateral side edge, opposite the first side edge **108***a*) also extends forward from the top opening **106**, downward to and along the instep area of the shoe **100**. The upper **102** further may include a tongue element **110** or other moderator component (e.g., a bootie type member) that lies along the front of the lower leg and ankle area and over the instep area of the shoe **100** (beneath side edges **108***a*, **108***b* and between the side edges **108***a*, **108***b* and a wearer's foot).

As further shown in FIGS. **1**B and **1**D through **2**C, this example upper **102** further includes a relatively large foot insertion opening **120** that extends rearwardly and downwardly from the first side edge **108***a* at least to a heel area of the upper **102**. A closure/securing system **130** (including a zipper system **132**) is provided for releasably closing the foot insertion opening **120** and securing the shoe **100** to a wearer's foot. These features of this example footwear structure **100** will be described in more detail below.

The foot insertion opening **120** allows the top opening **106** and upper **102** of the shoe **100** to be opened wider to allow for easy insertion of a foot. As shown in FIGS. **1**B and **2**A, the forward end **120***a* of the foot insertion opening **120** begins at the first side edge **108***a* in an ankle/lower leg covering area of the upper **102**. This forward end **120***a* may start at other locations along the overall shoe opening, including from the top opening portion **106** (optionally along a side of a wearer's leg) or at other locations along the first edge **108***a* (e.g., nearer to the top opening **106**, further down toward and even to the instep area, etc.). Additionally or alternatively, the foot insertion opening **120** could begin at (and be located at) the second side edge **108***b*, if desired.

As noted above, the foot insertion opening **120** in this illustrated example extends downwardly and rearwardly from the first side edge **108***a*. The opening **120** may extend at least to a rear heel area of the upper **102** (e.g., so the closed end **120***b* of the opening **120** is located in the rear heel area). As some more specific examples, the foot insertion opening **120** may extend at least to a vertical line VL extending through a rearmost point of the upper **102**, or even beyond this vertical line VL (see the location of closed end **120***b* in FIG. **1**D). The closed end **120***d* of the opening **120** may extend to the opposite side of the upper **102** even further than the distance shown in FIG. **1**D to further open the upper **102** for receiving a foot, even to the lateral rear heel area (e.g., point P_{LRH} in FIG. **1**D) or the lateral side heel area (point P_{LH} in FIG. **1**A), if desired.

While the actual size of the foot insertion opening **120** may vary (e.g., depending on the shoe size, etc.), in at least some examples of this invention, the foot receiving opening **120** will extend for a length (from Points L_{OE} to L_{CE} along the zipper system **132**) around at least 35% of a perimeter dimension of the top opening **106** around the heel (i.e., the dimension of the top leg opening **106** around the heel from the first side edge **108***a* (P_1) to the second side edge **108***b* (P_2)). Points P_1 and P_2 are located where the top leg opening **106** meets the side edges **108***a* and **108***b*, respectively. If a clear corner point transitioning between the top opening **106** and the side edges **108***a* and/or **108***b* is not provided in a specific footwear model at those locations, the points P_1 and P_2 may be determined as the location of a horizontal tangent point where the top opening **106** and the side edges **108***a*, **108***b* meet (when the shoe **100** sits on a horizontal surface). In some more specific examples, the foot insertion opening **120** (e.g., the longitudinal length of the zipper track) will extend around at least 40%, at least 50%, or even at least 55% of this perimeter dimension. From a more absolute dimensional point of view, in at least some examples of this invention, the length of the foot insertion opening **120** (from Points L_{OE} to L_{CE} along the zipper track) may be at least 5 inches, and in some examples, at least 6 inches, or even at least 7 inches.

From a vertical point of view, the closed end **120***b* of the foot insertion opening **120** may be located at less than 35% of an overall height dimension of the upper **102** at the location of the closed end **120***b*. More specifically, as shown in FIG. **1**D, the vertical dimension (with the shoe **100** sitting on a horizontal support surface S) from the closed end **120***b* to the location where the upper **102** and sole **104** meet (at the upper surface of midsole **104***a*, in this example), H_{CE}, is 35% or less than an overall vertical height H of the upper **102** at that location. In some more specific examples, the closed end **102***b* of the foot insertion opening **120** may be located at a height 30% or less, 25% or less, or even 20% or less of this overall height dimension H.

From a more absolute dimensional point of view, in at least some examples of this invention, the closed end **120***b* (point L_{CE}) may be located less than 1.25 inches vertically from the upper/sole junction point at that location, and in some examples, less than 1 inch, or even less than 0.75 inches from that junction point. With respect to actual height from a horizontal contact surface S, the closed end **120***b* (point L_{CE}) may be located less than 2.5 inches vertically from the contact surface S, and in some examples, less than 2.25 inches, less than 2 inches, or even less than 1.75 inches from that contact surface S. Additionally, with respect to actual height from a horizontal contact surface S, the open end **120***a* (point L_{OE}) may be located at least 3.5 inches vertically from the contact surface S, and in some examples, at least 3.75 inches, at least 4 inches, or at least 4.25 inches from the contact surface S. The vertical spacing distance between the closed end **120***b*

(point L_{CE}) and the open end **120***a* (point L_{OE}) (H_{DIFF} in FIG. **1**E) may vary without departing from this invention. In some more specific examples, the vertical height differential between points L_{CE} and L_{OE} (H_{DIFF}) may be at least 1.5 inches, and in some examples, at least 1.75 inches, at least 2 inches, and even at least 2.25 inches.

Various aspects and example features of footwear closure/securing systems (e.g., system **130**) for articles of footwear according to at least some examples of this invention now will be described in more detail. As shown in FIGS. **1**A through **3**A, this example article of footwear **100** includes a zipper system **132** engaged with the upper **102** on opposite side edges of the foot insertion opening **120** for at least partially closing the foot insertion opening **120**. In this example construction, the zipper system **132** fully closes the foot insertion opening **120** (i.e., extends from Points L_{OE} to L_{CE}). Thus, zipper system **132** may have a length of at least 35% of the perimeter dimension of the top opening **106** around the heel discussed above (and in some examples, this length will be at least 40%, at least 50%, or even at least 55% of this perimeter dimension). From a more absolute dimensional point of view, in at least some examples of this invention, the length of the zipper system **132** (from Points L_{OE} to L_{CE} along the zipper track) may be at least 5 inches, and in some examples, at least 6 inches, or even at least 7 inches. Releasable closure systems other than zippers could be used, if desired, in some constructions according to some aspects of this invention.

The slider element **134** of the zipper system **132** in this illustrated example is engaged with (or integrally formed to include) a strap **136**. The strap **136** in this illustrated example extends from the medial side of the upper **102**, over the first side edge **108***a*, beyond the second side edge **108***b*, and releasably secures to the lateral side of the upper **102** (e.g., via a hook-and-loop type fastener system **146**, via a buckle type assembly, via other mechanical connectors, etc.). The strap **136** and its securing features help keep the zipper system **132** closed (e.g., keeping slider element **134** at or near point L_{OE}) and help secure the shoe **100** to the wearer's foot in a snug and comfortable manner.

The closure/securing system **130** of this example footwear structure **100** further includes a lace element **138** extending across the instep area of the shoe **100** and connecting the first side edge **108***a* and the second side edge **108***b* of the upper **102**. If desired, this lace element **138** may engage the upper **102** through eyelets or eyelet type openings formed in the upper **102** (e.g., near side edges **108***a*, **108***b*) in a conventional manner as is commonly known and used in the footwear art. Additionally or alternatively, the lace element **138** also may be tied at the front/top of the upper **102** (e.g., at the instep and/or front leg area) in manners that are known and used in the footwear art. The lace element **138**, at least in part, may constitute a non-stretchable cord, textile, plastic, fiber, metal, or other component. The terms "non-stretchable" or "unstretchable" as used herein in this context mean a material that stretches less than 10% of its length (i.e., less than 0.2 inches for a 2 inch length of the material), when a tensile force of 10 lbs is applied to a 2 inch length of the material.

In this illustrated structure **100**, the lace element **138** engages with strap members **138***a* that may extend at least partially around the wearer's foot and/or at least partially beneath a plantar support surface of the shoe. If desired, at least some of strap members **138***a* may extend completely around the plantar support surface of the shoe **100**, from edge **108***a* to edge **108***b*. Lace engagement structures and strap members **138***a* of this type are described in U.S. Patent Appln. Publ. Nos. 2012/0011744 and 2012/0198720, which applications are entirely incorporated herein by reference. Any of the wrap-around foot engaging systems and/or lace engaging structures described in these patent publications may be used in connection with the footwear structure **100** according to this invention. These types of wrap-around foot engaging systems and/or lace engaging structures can help provide a very comfortable, adaptive, and secure fit of an article of footwear to a wearer's foot.

The closure/securing system **130** of this example footwear structure **100** includes additional features. As illustrated in FIGS. **1**B and **1**E, the strap **136** is engaged with two stretchable or elastic members **140***a* and **140***b* (although one or more elastic members may be used without departing from this invention). The elastic members **140***a* and **140***b* help assure that the strap **136** is pulled tightly to engage the strap **136** around the wearer's foot, e.g., as shown in FIG. **1**E. While not a requirement, as shown in the illustrated example, portions of elastic members **140***a* and **140***b* extend between layers of the upper (e.g., as shown FIG. **1**B). The elastic members **140***a* and/or **140***b* may extend through guide system **160** (also called a "guide element" or "guide member" herein), as will be explained in more detail below in conjunction with FIGS. **4**A through **4**D (and potential guide system **160** locations and tracks are shown in dash-double dot lines in FIGS. **1**A, **1**B, and **1**D). The term "stretchable" as used herein in this context means a material that stretches at least 25% of its length (i.e., at least 0.5 inches for a 2 inch length of the material) when a tensile force of 10 lbs is applied to a 2 inch length of the material. An "elastic" material is a "stretchable" material the returns at least substantially (i.e., at least 95%) to its original length when the 10 lb force is released. Additionally or alternatively, if desired, at least a portion of the strap **136** may be stretchable (in place of or in addition to any stretch provided by the elastic members **140***a*, **140***b*).

If desired, the elastic member(s) (e.g., **140***a*, **140***b*) or other strap **136** tightening or securing structures may be fixedly engaged with the shoe **100** (e.g., with the upper **102**, with the sole structure **104**, between the upper **102** and sole structure **104**, etc.) to provide a support for pulling the strap **136** and stretching the elastic member(s) **140***a*, **140***b* and/or strap **136**. Such a system may be used, for example, if the lace element **138** is of a conventional design (e.g., separately tied by the wearer) or if the lace element **138** is replaced with another type of instep closure system, such as one or more elastic bands (as described in more detail below in conjunction with FIG. **5**) or other elements. The example footwear structure **100** of FIGS. **1**A through **1**E, however, has a different construction. As shown in FIG. **1**C, in this example structure **100**, the two opposing ends of lace element **138** extend between layers of the upper **102** at a location along the second side edge **108***b* of the upper **102**. Thus, in this example structure, the lace **138** engages more eyelet or other lace engaging elements **138***a* on the first side **108***a* than on the second side **108***b*, and the free ends of the lace element **138** come close together and extend along the upper **102** on the second side **108***b*. If desired, the lace element **138** may extend through a guide system **160**, as will be explained in more detail below in conjunction with FIGS. **4**A through **4**D. These ends of lace element **138** may engage (directly or indirectly) with free ends of elastic members **140***a* and **140***b* (e.g., at a location inside or between layers of the upper **102**) such that pulling the strap **136** to stretch the elastic members **140***a* and **140***b* applies a tensile force to pull and tighten the lace element **138** at and across the instep area.

Therefore, the closure/securing system **130** in accordance with this illustrated example footwear structure **100** includes: (a) a first portion (e.g., the lace element **138**) that extends between the first side edge **108***a* and the second side edge

108*b* at the instep area (this lace element **138** may tighten a strap system that wraps around the sides and at least to a plantar support area of the shoe), (b) a second portion (e.g., at least a portion of lace element **138** and/or at least a portion of elastic members **140***a*, **140***b*) that extends past the second side edge **108***b* (and optionally inside or between layers of the upper **102**) and around the heel area of the upper **102**, and (c) a third portion (e.g., strap **136**) that extends past the first side edge **108***a* and over the second side edge **108***b* to releasably engage the upper **102** (e.g., via a hook-and-loop type fastener arrangement). The first, second, and third portions of the closure/securing system **130** may form a continuous path (e.g., from the front, instep area of the shoe **100** to the free end of strap **136**). At least some of the first and/or second portions of the closure/securing system **130** may be unstretchable, while at least some of at least one of the second and/or third portions of the closure/securing system **130** may be elastic or stretchable. If desired, at least some of the first and/or second portions of the closure/securing system **130** (e.g., at least some of lace element **138** and/or elastic members **140***a*, **140***b*) may extend inside the upper **102** and/or between layers of the upper **102**. Additionally or alternatively, if desired, at least some of the third portion of the closure/securing system **130** (e.g., the strap **136**) may extend inside the upper **102** and/or between layers of the upper **102**.

Operation of the closure/securing system **130** will be described in more detail below in conjunction with FIGS. **2**A through **3**A. FIGS. **1**A through **1**E illustrate the article of footwear **100** with the closure/securing system **130** engaged and pulled tight, e.g., as it would be when secured to a wearer's foot (not shown). In this arrangement, the elastic members **140***a*, **140***b* (or other elastic portions) may be pulled tight and held in place by a releasable engagement between the strap **136** and the upper **102** (or sole structure **104**), e.g., via a hook-and-loop fastener system **146**, via a buckle assembly, via another type of releasable connection, etc.). This configuration also may pull the slider **134** of the zipper system **132** to the open end **120***a* of the foot insertion opening **120**, thereby closing the foot insertion opening **120**.

To remove the shoe **100** from the foot, first the strap **136** is released from its releasable connection to upper **102** and/or sole structure **104** (e.g., by disconnecting the components of the hook-and-loop fastener **146**). This action causes the elastic members **140***a*, **140***b* to return back toward their unstretched condition. The elastic portions of the closure/securing system **130** (e.g., elements **140***a*, **140***b*, and/or elastic in the strap **136**) may be sized so that when the tensile force is released in this manner, retraction of the elastic components will cause the slider element **134** of the zipper system **132** to begin moving down the track of the zipper **132** (at least if the slider element **134** had been extended to the end **120***a* of the zipper track). As an example, this release of tensile force may move the slider element **134** at least a few teeth down the zipper track (e.g., 1 to 10 teeth), as shown in FIG. **2**A. This tensile force release also may, at least in part, loosen the lace element **138** across the instep area of the shoe **100** (e.g., if the strap **136** and elastic members **140***a*, **140***b* are operatively coupled with the lace element **138**).

If desired, one could continue to open the zipper system **132** by pulling the strap **136** to move the slider **134** further down the zipper track (optionally to closed end **120***b*). Alternatively, the wearer can grasp the upper **102** at a location above and/or rearward of the foot insertion opening **120** and pull the top portion of the upper **102** rearward to move the slider element **134** down the zipper track (and to essentially unwrap the upper **102** from around the wearer's leg). See FIG. **2**B. As shown in FIG. **2**C, this action moves the slider element **134** rearward and downward toward and/or to the closed end **120***b* of the foot insertion opening **120** and opens up a large, wide area for removal and insertion of a foot. Optionally, if desired, the upper **102** may include a grip enhancing and/or wear/abrasion resistant element **144** at a location where the user will tend to grip the upper **102** during this closure/securing system **130** loosening phase. In addition or as an alternative to a layer of grip enhancing and/or wear/abrasion resistant material, element **144** also may include a projecting tab (e.g., of fabric or plastic) or a handle element extending outward from the upper (capable of being grasped).

To put the shoe **100** on, the shoe **100** can start with the closure/securing system **130** in the arrangement shown in FIG. **2**C, and the user can insert his/her foot into the shoe **100** through the opened closure/securing system **130**. If desired, the tongue element **110** may be secured to the upper **102**, e.g., along one or both of the side edges **108***a*, **108***b*, to help prevent the tongue element **110** from falling into the interior of the shoe **100** (and thus being in the way when the user inserts his/her foot). This can be accomplished, for example, using sewing or stitching (to tack the tongue element **110** to one or both edges **108***a*, **108***b*), using one or more elastic type straps **110***a* (so that the tongue element **110** is fixed to the edge(s) but can still be stretched forward with respect to the opening area), or in other manners. As other potential options, the tongue element **110** can be integrally joined along the side edges **108***a*, **108***b* and/or optionally made at least in part from a stretchable or extensible material, such as from a SPANDEX type stretchable/elastomeric fabric (e.g., like an internal bootie element), with a gusseted construction along at least one of the side edges **108***a*, **108***b*, etc.

Once the shoe **100** is positioned on the foot, the strap **136** can be pulled forward and upward as shown in FIG. **3**A, which action moves the slider **134** of the zipper system **132** up the zipper track toward the open end **120***a* of the foot insertion opening **120**, to thereby close the foot insertion opening **120**. The strap **136** then can be pulled tight and wrapped around the front of the ankle/leg, over the first and second side edges **108***a*, **108***b*, and secured at the opposite side of the upper **102** from the main part of the zipper element **132** (e.g., using hook-and-loop fastener **146**). This strap **136** tightening action also may, at least in part, tighten the lace element **138** across the instep area of the shoe **100** (if the strap **136** and elastic members **140***a*, **140***b* are operatively coupled with the lace element **138**).

While the embodiment shown in FIGS. **1**A through **3**A show the shoe **100** with the zipper element **132** primarily on the medial side of the upper **102** (and the strap **136** wrapping from the medial side to the lateral side), the opposite configuration also is possible (with the zipper element **132** primarily on the lateral side of the upper **102** and the strap **136** wrapping from the lateral side to the medial side). As another potential option, if desired, one shoe **100** of a pair of shoes may have the zipper element **132** primarily on the medial side of the upper **102** (and the strap **136** wrapping from the medial side to the lateral side) and the other shoe of the pair may have the opposite configuration (with the zipper element **132** primarily on the lateral side of the upper **102** and the strap **136** wrapping from the lateral side to the medial side).

Optionally, if desired, and as illustrated in FIG. **3**B, the rear heel area of the sole **104** and/or the upper **102** may include a handle or tab **150** that the user can grasp to help pull the shoe **100** all the way onto the foot (and get the toes down to the end of the shoe **100**). Other structures may be provided for this purpose, if desired. For example, the handle or tab **150** may be shaped and positioned (e.g., of sufficient length to contact the floor) so that the user can step down on it (or otherwise apply

force to it) to hold the shoe **100** in place while toes of the foot being inserted are pushed into the upper **102**. As another example, as shown in FIGS. **3**B and **3**C, the upper **102** or sole structure **104** may include a bearing element **152** along a side that extends sideways to allow a rearward force to be applied to the shoe **100** (e.g., by the opposite foot or leg; by a wall, table, or chair; etc.). Optionally, this type of bearing member **152** may be mounted to fold forward along the side of the upper **102** and/or sole structure **104**, e.g., on a hinge **154**, or to retract into the sole structure **104** (or between the upper **102** and the sole structure **104**), e.g., by a spring loaded mount.

As mentioned above, if desired, at least some portions of the lace element **138** and/or the elastic members **140***a*, **140***b* may extend inside or between layers of the upper **102**. As another option, if desired, these members may at least partially extend around the heel area of the shoe **100** around the exterior surface of the upper **102**. In such structures, at least some portions of the lace element **138**, the elastic members **140***a*, **140***b*, and even the strap **136** may extend through a guide system **160**. The guide system **160** can help maintain the lace element **138**, the elastic members **140***a*, **140***b*, and/or the strap **136** in desired position(s) with respect to the upper **102** and/or help maintain a clear path so that these components can be pulled tight when securing the shoe **100** to a wearer foot. The guide system **160** also can help conceal these components to avoid unnecessary or undesired contact and/or interaction with other objects.

FIGS. **4**A through **4**D show cross sectional views of various potential examples of guide element **160** structures. The guide element(s) **160** may be provided along at least portions of the desired tracks of lace element **138**, elastic members **140***a*, **140***b*, and/or strap **136**, as shown in dash-double dot lines in FIGS. **1**A, **1**B, and **1**D.

FIG. **4**A shows a guide member **160** provided as a tubular member between two layers **102***a* and **102***b* of upper material (e.g., between a spacer mesh inner layer and an abrasion resistant TPU or synthetic leather outer layer). The guide member **160** may be made from a rigid or flexible material, e.g., plastic, fabric, or textile materials. The guide member **160** further may include structures **162** that enable the guide member **160** to be engaged with one or both of the upper layers **102***a*, **102***b*, e.g., such as by sewing or stitching, by adhesives or cements, by fusing techniques, etc. An internal area **164** defined by the guide member **160** houses at least portions of the lace element **138** and/or elastic members **140***a*, **140***b* (and/or optionally, at least a portion of the strap **136**), depending on the location of the guide member **160** around the shoe **100**.

FIG. **4**B shows a similar two layer upper construction in which the guide member **160'** has an open side and a surface of one of the upper layers (e.g., layer **102***b*, in this example) defines one side of the guide member internal area **164'** (in which the elements **138**, **140***a*, and/or **140***b* are contained). Again, the guide member **160'** may be engaged with one or both of the upper layers **102***a*, **102***b*, e.g., at structures **162'**, such as by sewing or stitching, by adhesives or cements, by fusing techniques, etc.

FIG. **4**C shows a guide member **160"** engaged with a single layer **102***a* of an upper. Again, the guide member **160"** has an open side and a surface of upper layer **102***a* defines one side of the guide member internal area **164"** (in which the elements **138**, **140***a*, and/or **140***b* are contained). Again, the guide member **160"** may be engaged with upper layer **102***a*, e.g., at structures **162"**, such as by sewing or stitching, by adhesives or cements, by fusing techniques, etc. In this example construction, the guide member **160"** extends outward from the upper layer **102***a*, and the guide member **160"** may be oriented on an interior or an exterior surface of this upper layer **102***a*.

FIG. **4**D also shows a guide member **160'"** engaged with a single layer **102***a* of an upper. In this example structure, a thin cover element **166** is provided along at least some portion of a longitudinal length of the guide member **160'"** (to close off and partially define internal area **164'"** in which the elements **138**, **140***a*, and/or **140***b* are contained). This cover element **166** may be formed from any desired type of material, including, for example, a rigid or flexible polymeric material, a fabric or textile material, etc. Again, the guide member **160'"** may be engaged with upper layer **102***a*, e.g., at structures **162'"**, such as by sewing or stitching, by adhesives or cements, by fusing techniques, etc. In this example construction, the guide member **160'"** extends or recesses into the upper layer **102***a*, and the guide member **160'"** may be oriented on an interior or an exterior surface of this upper layer **102***a*. In some structures, if desired, the cover element **166** may be omitted, at least over some portions of the guide member structure **160'"**.

While always shown including two elements **138**, **140***a*, and/or **140***b* in FIGS. **4**A through **4**D, guide elements of any of these types may include a single portion of the closure/securing system **130** or more than two components. For example, as shown in FIGS. **1**A, **1**B, and **1**D, the guide member may divide or separate at the rear heel portion (or other portion) of the shoe structure **100**, and a single element **138**, **140***a*, and/**140***b* may be provided in at least some of the guide members (e.g., on opposite sides of zipper system **132**). The guide system need not extend continuously along the entire path shown in FIGS. **1**A, **1**B, and **1**D, but it may be discontinuous (e.g., in multiple separate parts, e.g., akin to belt loop type structures) or otherwise shorter than the entire path.

If necessary or desired, in any of the constructions of FIGS. **4**A through **4**D, the interior wall of internal area **164**, the elements **138**, **140***a*, and/or **140***b*, the cover element **166**, and/or the surface of the upper **102** defining the internal area **164** may be treated so as to reduce sliding friction between the various parts contained in the internal area (e.g., so that the elements **138**, **140***a*, and/or **140***b* move more freely and easily when pulled or released). As some more specific examples, if desired, the treatment may include a polytetrafluoroethylene coating or infusion, graphite coating or infusion, treatment with other lubricants, etc. Additionally or alternatively, if desired, at least portions of the internal wall of the internal area **164** of the guide element **160**, the cover member **166**, and/or the surface of the upper **102** may be made from a material having a low coefficient of friction with respect to elements **138**, **140***a*, and/or **140***b*. The elements (e.g., **138**, **140***a*, **140***b*) contained within the internal area **164** may be made from materials or treated to have a low coefficient of friction with respect to one another (or with respect to other surfaces and/or structures within internal area **164**). These features can help prevent elements **138**, **140***a*, and/or **140***b* from binding and/or sticking when the closure/securing system **130** is tightened or released.

In footwear structures **100** in which instep securing element(s) (e.g., non-elastic or unstretchable lace elements **138**) directly engage with the pull strap **136** (e.g., via elastic stretch components **140***a*, **140***b*), the location of the transition between the unstretchable lace elements **138** and the elastic pull strap components **140***a*, **140***b* may occur at any desired location around the upper structure **102**. As some more specific examples, this transition may occur in the lateral side heel area (e.g., see FIG. **1**A, point P_4), in the rear heel area (e.g., FIG. **1**D, points P_5), or even in the medial side heel area

(e.g., FIG. **1**B, points P_6). This transition also may occur within the guide elements **160** (if any), between layers of the upper **102** (if multiple layers are present), inside the upper **102**, and/or outside of the upper **102**. When two or more securing component (**138**, **140***a*, **140***b*) paths are provided around the upper **102**, the transition(s) between unstretchable and elastic materials (if any) may occur at the same or different locations around the upper **102**.

FIG. **5** illustrates another example article of footwear structure **500** in accordance with some examples of this invention. While the footwear structure **500** of FIG. **5** is similar to that of FIGS. **1**A through **1**D, in this illustrated example structure **500**, the lace elements **138** from FIG. **1**C are replaced by one or more stretchable or elastic bands **502** that extend across the instep opening from side edge **108***a* to side edge **108***b*. The elastic band(s) **502** allow the size of the instep area of the shoe **500** to expand as the foot moves inward and then return to or toward their original size to help maintain the shoe in a tightened condition on the wearer's foot. If desired, elastic bands **502** may engage straps **138***a* for wrap-around and adaptive fit type components of the types described above in conjunction with FIG. **1**C (and as described in U.S. Patent Appln. Publ. Nos. 2012/0011744 and 2012/0198720).

In this example structure **500**, the strap **136** still is engaged with a slider element **134** of zipper system **132** and is mounted on one or more elastic elements **140***a*, **140***b* that extend at least partially around the wearer's foot to help secure the shoe to the wearer's foot. The elastic element(s) **140***a*, **140***b* in this illustrated example shoe structure **500**, however, do not extend around to and/or engage the closure/securing element(s) **502** provided at the instep area of the shoe. Rather, in this shoe structure **500**, the elastic element(s) **140***a*, **140***b* are fixed to one of the upper **102** and/or the sole structure **104** and/or held between the upper **102** and sole structure **104**. The fixing point for the end(s) of elastic element(s) **140***a*, **140***b* may be at any desired location around the shoe structure **500**, such as in the lateral heel area, in the rear heel area, and/or in the medial heel area, etc. (e.g., in the general areas designated as points P_4, P_5, and P_6 in the discussion above with respect to FIGS. **1**A through **1**E, between the upper and the sole structure, etc.). Additionally or alternatively, if desired, the strap **136** could be made at least partially from a stretchable material and used to tighten the shoe **500** to the wearer's leg.

The shoe **500** of FIG. **5** may include strap **136**, zipper system **132**, and/or elastic elements **140***a*, **140***b* of the types described above in FIGS. **1**A through **1**D, and these components may operate in a manner the same as or similar to those described above for the structure **100** of FIGS. **1**A through **1**D (e.g., as described in conjunction with FIGS. **2**A-**3**A) except loosening of the strap **136** and relaxation of the tensile force in elements **140***a*, **140***b* will not affect tightness across the instep area. Nonetheless, the zipper system **132** and the closure system **130** may be opened and closed in the same general manner.

Those skilled in the art will understand that the structures, options, and/or alternatives for the footwear structures described herein, including the features of the various different embodiments of the invention, may be used in any desired combinations, subcombinations, and the like, without departing from the invention. For example, if desired, the elastic band(s) **502** of FIG. **5** may be used in conjunction with the lace element **138** of FIGS. **1**A through **3**A. As another example, the footwear structure **500** of FIG. **5** may include the handle and/or bearing members of FIGS. **3**B and **3**C without departing from this invention. The example footwear structure **500** of FIG. **5** also may include one or more of the guide element structures **160** and arrangements as shown in FIGS. **4**A through **4**D, if desired. Other combinations of specific features, components, and combinations also may be used without departing from this invention.

Further variations from the illustrated structures may be made in the closure/securing system **130**. As some additional examples, if desired, more or fewer (or no) elastic bands **140***a*, **140***b* may be provided without departing from this invention. Additionally or alternatively, the elastic bands **140***a*, **140***b*, when present, may have different sizes, cross sectional shapes, attachment location(s) to the strap **136**, and the like from the specifically illustrated structures, and the bands **140***a*, **140***b* on a single shoe **100** (when multiple bands are present) may have the same or different constructions. The band(s) **140***a*, **140***b* also may extend around the shoe **100** in different directions from those illustrated, including at different relative directions and/or angles from one another. The band(s) **140***a*, **140***b* need not extend inside and/or between layers of the upper **102** as shown in FIG. **1**B, but if they do, the location(s) at which the band(s) **140***a*, **140***b* move from an exterior location to an interior location with respect to the upper **102** may vary (e.g., the location(s) may be nearer to the strap **136**, at higher and/or lower locations with respect to the zipper system **132**, further around the rear heel area, more toward the opposite side of the shoe, at wider spaced apart locations around the perimeter, etc.). Also, the entry location for the band(s) **140***a*, **140***b* (i.e., the opening through which the band(s) **140***a*, **140***b* extend inside the upper **102**) may have shapes other than round, such as square, rectangular, triangular, other polygonal shapes, oval or elliptical shaped, star shaped, cross shaped, logo shaped, irregularly shaped, etc. More than one band **140***a*, **140***b* may extend through a single opening to the interior of the upper **102**, if desired (e.g., at a location beyond the end of the zipper system **132**). When multiple openings for this purpose are present in a shoe construction, the individual openings may have the same or different shapes from one another. The strap **136** also may be sized, shaped, and oriented differently from the illustrated structures and arrangements, if desired. The various options noted above also may be used in any desired combinations or subcombinations without departing from this invention. Accordingly, a wide variety of options and design choices are available for the various structures of the closure/securing system **130**.

The lace component **138** and its orientation on a shoe also may differ without departing from this invention. For example, as noted above, the lace component **138** may engage more conventional eyelets or holes through the upper **102** at the instep area. The lace component **138** also may have different sizes, cross sectional shapes, and/or cross the instep area of the shoe **100** a different number of times from that shown without departing from this invention. Also, while the shoe **100** of FIG. **1**C shows both ends of lace component **138** extending inside the upper **102** at the lateral side of the shoe **100**, other arrangements are possible without departing from this invention. For example, both ends of lace component **138** could extend inside the upper **102** at the medial side of the shoe **100**. As another example, the opposite ends of lace component **138** could extend inside the upper **102** at opposite sides of the shoe **100** (and potentially engage different straps **136** or one of the ends of the lace component **138** could wrap around a direction change element provided on or with the shoe **100** to change direction and engage the same strap **136** as the other end). As yet another example, if desired, the ends of lace component **138** could extend along the outside of the upper **102** (on one or both sides, optionally at least partially within a guide member **160**). Accordingly, many variations

on the lace structure **138** and arrangement are possible without departing from this invention.

The tension applying systems (e.g., to tighten lace element **138** and/or strap **136**) also may have other structures without departing from this invention. For example, a pulley doubler type system may be provided, e.g., to reduce the pulling force needed to apply tensile force to the lace element **138**. As additional options, other tension applying devices could be provided, e.g., at the front, instep, and/or side ankle areas of the shoe **100**, such as a rotary "take up" mechanism that winds to roll up excess lace element **138** (and thereby apply tensile force to the lace element **138**). Such tension applying devices may replace the strap **136** and elastic bands **140***a*, **140***b*, in at least some footwear structures and/or they may be engaged with the zipper slider **134**, if desired, to pull the zipper slider **134** downwardly and rearwardly when the tension is released (e.g., to perform the tension release functions with respect to the zipper slider **134** described above in conjunction with FIG. **2**A).

III. Conclusion

The present invention is disclosed above and in the accompanying drawings with reference to a variety of embodiments. The purpose served by the disclosure, however, is to provide an example of the various features and concepts related to the invention, not to limit the scope of the invention. One skilled in the relevant art will recognize that numerous variations and modifications may be made to the embodiments described above without departing from the scope of the present invention, as defined by the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. An article of footwear, comprising:

an upper including a top opening, a first side edge extending forward from the top opening and along an instep area, and a second side edge opposite the first side edge and extending forward from the top opening and along the instep area, wherein the upper includes a foot insertion opening extending rearwardly and downwardly from the first side edge at least to a heel area of the upper;

a zipper system for at least partially closing the foot insertion opening engaged with the upper, wherein the zipper system includes a slider element;

a tightening system for tightening the upper to a wearer's foot, the tightening system including:

a first portion extending between the first side edge and the second side edge at the instep area,

a second portion extending past the second side edge and around the heel area of the upper, and

a third portion engaged with the slider element of the zipper system; and

a sole structure engaged with the upper.

2. An article of footwear according to claim **1**,

wherein the third portion of the tightening system includes a strap engaged with the slider element of the zipper system, wherein the strap extends beyond the second side edge and releasably secures to the upper.

3. An article of footwear according to claim **1**, wherein:

the first portion of the tightening system includes a lace element extending across the instep area and connecting the first side edge and the second side edge of the upper; and

the third portion of the tightening system includes a strap engaged with the slider element of the zipper system, wherein the strap extends beyond the second side edge and releasably secures to the upper, wherein the lace element is engaged with the strap such that pulling the strap to a location to releasably secure to the upper tightens the lace element at the instep area.

4. An article of footwear according to claim **1**, wherein:

the first portion of the tightening system includes a lace element extending across the instep area and connecting the first side edge and the second side edge of the upper;

the second portion of the tightening system includes a first elastic element; and

the third portion of the tightening system includes a strap engaged with the slider element of the zipper system, wherein the strap extends beyond the second side edge and releasably secures to the upper, and wherein the lace element is engaged with the strap via the first elastic element, and wherein pulling the strap to a location to releasably secure to the upper places the first elastic element under tension and tightens the lace element at the instep area.

5. An article of footwear according to claim **1**, wherein the first, second, and third portions of the tightening system form a continuous path.

6. An article of footwear according to claim **1**, wherein at least some of the first portion of the tightening system is unstretchable, and wherein at least some of the second portion of the tightening system is elastic.

7. An article of footwear according to claim **6**, wherein the third portion of the tightening system includes a strap that extends from the slider element beyond the second side edge and releasably secures to the upper at a location beyond the second side edge.

8. An article of footwear according to claim **6**, wherein at least some of the first portion of the tightening system extends between layers of the upper.

9. An article of footwear according to claim **6**, wherein at least some of the second portion of the tightening system extends between layers of the upper.

10. An article of footwear according to claim **6**, wherein at least some of the first portion of the tightening system extends between layers of the upper, and wherein at least some of the second portion of the tightening system extends between layers of the upper.

11. An article of footwear according to claim **1**, further comprising:

a guide system engaged with the upper, wherein at least some of the first portion of the tightening system passes through the guide system.

12. An article of footwear according to claim **1**, further comprising:

a guide system engaged with the upper, wherein at least some of the second portion of the tightening system passes through the guide system.

13. An article of footwear according to claim **1**, further comprising:

a guide system engaged with the upper, wherein at least some of the first portion of the tightening system and at least some of the second portion of the tightening system pass through the guide system.

14. An article of footwear according to claim **1**, further comprising:

a grip element engaged with the upper at a location proximate to the top opening and the first edge and above the zipper system.

15. An article of footwear according to claim **1**, wherein the first side edge is located on a medial side of the upper, wherein the second side edge is located on a lateral side of the upper, and wherein the foot insertion opening extends at least to a vertical line extending through a rearmost point of the upper.

16. An article of footwear according to claim **1**, wherein the foot insertion opening extends beyond a vertical line extending through a rearmost point of the upper.

17. An article of footwear according to claim 1, wherein the first side edge is located on a medial side of the upper and the second side edge is located on a lateral side of the upper.

18. An article of footwear according to claim 1, further comprising:

a first elastic element extending between and connecting the first side edge and the second side edge of the upper.

19. An article of footwear, comprising:

an upper including a top opening, a first side edge extending forward from the top opening and along an instep area, and a second side edge opposite the first side edge and extending forward from the top opening and along the instep area, wherein the upper includes a foot insertion opening extending rearwardly and downwardly from the first side edge at least to a heel area of the upper;

a closure system for releasably closing the foot insertion opening, wherein the closure system includes a strap that extends from a first side of the upper, beyond the second side edge, and releasably secures to the upper at a location beyond the second side edge;

a lace element extending across the instep area and connecting the first side edge and the second side edge of the upper, wherein the lace element is engaged with the strap via a first elastic element, and wherein pulling the strap to the location to releasably secure to the upper places the first elastic element under tension and tightens the lace element at the instep area; and

a sole structure engaged with the upper.

20. An article of footwear according to claim 19, wherein the strap of the closure system extends over the first side edge of the upper.

21. An article of footwear according to claim 20,

wherein the closure system includes a zipper system that opens and closes the foot insertion opening, and wherein the strap engages a slider element of the zipper system.

22. An article of footwear according to claim 19, wherein the closure system includes a zipper system that opens and closes the foot insertion opening, and wherein the strap engages a slider element of the zipper system.

23. An article of footwear according to claim 19, wherein the first side edge is located on a medial side of the upper, wherein the second side edge is located on a lateral side of the upper, and wherein the foot insertion opening extends at least to a vertical line extending through a rearmost point of the upper.

24. An article of footwear according to claim 19, wherein the foot insertion opening extends beyond a vertical line extending through a rearmost point of the upper.

25. An article of footwear according to claim 19, further comprising:

a second elastic element extending between and connecting the first side edge and the second side edge of the upper.

26. An article of footwear according to claim 25, wherein the strap of the closure system extends over the first side edge of the upper.

27. An article of footwear, comprising:

a hightop upper including a leg opening, wherein the hightop upper includes a foot insertion opening extending rearwardly and downwardly from a front portion of the leg opening to a heel area of the hightop upper, and wherein the hightop upper includes a first side edge and a second side edge located at an instep area of the hightop upper;

a closure system for releasably closing the foot insertion opening, wherein the closure system includes a strap that extends from a first side of the hightop upper and releasably secures to the hightop upper at a location on a second side of the hightop upper;

a lace element extending across the instep area and connecting the first side edge and the second side edge of the hightop upper, wherein the lace element is engaged with the strap via a first elastic element, and wherein pulling the strap to the location to releasably secure to the hightop upper places the first elastic element under tension and tightens the lace element at the instep area; and

a sole structure engaged with the hightop upper.

28. An article of footwear according to claim 27, wherein the strap of the closure system extends over the second side of the hightop upper.

29. An article of footwear according to claim 28, wherein the closure system includes a zipper system that opens and closes the foot insertion opening, and wherein the strap engages a slider element of the zipper system.

30. An article of footwear according to claim 27, further comprising:

a grip element engaged with the hightop upper at a location proximate to the leg opening and above the foot insertion opening.

31. An article of footwear according to claim 27, wherein the foot insertion opening extends beyond a vertical line extending through a rearmost point of the hightop upper.

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